DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 173 826 CS 204 975

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TITLE Adolescents' Perceptions of Foreign-Made Products: Implications for Advertising Strategy.
PUB DATE Aug 79
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (62nd, Houston, Texas, August 5-8, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Consumer Economics; *Foreign Countries; High School Students; Media Research; *Merchandise Information; Secondary Education; *Stereotypes; Television Commercials
IDENTIFIERS *Advertising; Germany; Japan

ABSTRACT

A five-point, seven-item semantic differential scale was used to collect data from 130 high school students about their perceptions of foreign-made products and the relation of national stereotypes to product stereotypes. To assure consistency, the same product classes (all products, automobiles, cameras, and mechanical toys) and foreign countries (Germany and Japan) were used. United States products were included in the instrument as a control measure. Since the subjects perceived a difference between all U.S. products and the individual product classes, the instrument exhibits a certain degree of face validity. Other findings showed that the subjects generally differentiated between national stereotypes and specific product classes. The subjects, however, did not significantly differentiate between all German products versus German automobiles and all Japanese products versus Japanese automobiles, suggesting that German and Japanese automobiles have a set national stereotype, perhaps resulting from large-scale television advertising. (RI)

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ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FOREIGN-MADE PRODUCTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVERTISING STRATEGY

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ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FOREIGN-MADE PRODUCTS:

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVERTISING STRATEGY

There is little question that perception affects how consumers act in both domestic and international marketplaces. Studies have shown that consumers hold enduring perceptions which serve as information attributes for making judgments about products (for example see Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell, 1978; Schiffman and Kanuk, 1978). While most of this research has dealt with consumer perceptions of domestic products, several studies have investigated the perceptual relationship between national stereotypes and foreign-made products (Etzel and Walker, 1974; Nagashima, 1970, 1977; Rierson, 1966; and Worthing, 1974). For the most part, these studies have shown that consumer perceptions of a particular foreign-made product are not necessarily congruent with that product's country of origin.

In 1966, for example, Rierson surveyed student opinions concerning the relationship between national and product stereotypes. He found significant differences among opinions expressed about product classes (i.e., mechanical, food, and fashion merchandise) and national stereotypes (i.e., "made in"). More recently, Etzel and Walker (1974) compared the attitudes of U.S. housewives toward individual product classes from the same foreign country. According to their findings, housewives can differentiate be-

tween rational product stereotypes and stereotypes of specific products. These studies are neither exhaustive nor have they been validated through the process of replication, however.

The purpose of this inquiry is to extend the existing body of empirical knowledge by examining adolescents' perceptions of foreign-made products. Such data are important for both practical and academic reasons. On the practical side, the findings will provide relevant information for those involved in the marketing of foreign-made products to adolescent consumers. With the tremendous growth in international marketing, such data will undoubtedly contribute to the development of international marketing and advertising strategies. On the academic side, the findings will validate or challenge the findings reported by Rierson and Etzel and Walker.

HYPOTHESIS

The following hypothesis was tested:

H_1 Adolescents' perceptions of all products from a particular country will significantly differ from their perceptions of particular products from that country.

SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

One Hundred and thirty adolescents enrolled in a high school in a major Southwestern city participated in the study. All of the subjects were from similar socio-economic backgrounds and ranged in age from 14 to 16. The sample was composed of approximately equal numbers of males and females. The measurement instruments were administered during a regular class session. Proctor assistance was provided for those subjects who experienced difficulty in completing the task.

The procedure used by Etzel and Walker was closely followed. A five-point, seven-item semantic differential like-scale was constructed and administered to the subjects. To assure measurement consistency, the same product classes (i.e., all products, automobiles, cameras, and mechanical toys) and foreign countries (i.e., Germany and Japan) were used. U.S. products were included in the instrument as a control measure.[1] For a more comprehensive discussion of the procedure, the reader is advised to consult the Etzel and Walker study.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the data obtained for the U.S. product comparisons. As the table indicates, the subjects were able to perceive a difference between all U.S. products and the individual product classses. All three measures were significant beyond the .005 level. This finding indicates that the instrument has a certain degree of face validilty.

Table 1 also presents the data for the other six treatments of the study. Four of the six F distributions were statistically significant ($p > .004$). This finding indicates that the subjects were generally able to differentiate between national stereotypes and specific product classes. The subjects, however, did not significantly differentiate between all German products versus German automobiles and all Japanese products versus Japanese automobiles.

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1. Because adolescents are more familiar with American-made products, the differences between "all U.S. products" and "U.S. autos" should be as great or greater than perceived differences for foreign-made products.

Their failure to differentiate indicates that German and Japanese automobiles have a set national stereotype. This failure is perhaps the result of heavy exposure to mass advertising for German and Japanese automobiles. Foreign made toys and cameras are not as extensively advertised and, for the most part, are advertised in the print media. German and Japanese automobiles, on the other hand, are heavily advertised on television and general knowledge about them is widely diffused. Consequently, automobiles might form the national stereotype against which all other products are perceived. This explanation, of course, is mere speculation and must be proved or disproved through additional research.

SUMMARY AND STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

The results reported here support the findings of previous studies and provide useful information for the development of international advertising strategy. Adolescents, like college students and housewives, are able to and do differentiate between national product stereotypes and specific foreign-made products. This finding suggests that a marketer should not attempt to endlessly capitalize on a positive national stereotype to promote inferior products or feel reluctant to market new products to American adolescents for fear of negative stereotype carry over. In the final analysis, the American adolescent is a perceptually alert and selective consumer.

Considering the findings of the other studies, this means that when appraising the opportunity to use advertising to promote foreign-made products careful attention must be given to differences between consumer perceptions

of national product stereotypes and stereotypes of specific products. Such differences suggest positioning strategies that can take advantage of favorable consumer perceptions or help overcome unfavorable ones. When a foreign-made product, for example, is perceived as congruent with a positive national stereotype, positioning that national stereotype in association with the product can possibly enhance that product's stereotype (e.g., Japanese automobiles and all Japanese-made products). When a specific product is perceived as unfavorable and the national stereotype as favorable, positioning the product against competitors' products with favorable stereotypes and not against the national stereotype might possibly be more effective.

Situations might also arise where a national stereotype is perceived as unfavorable and a specific product stereotype as favorable. In such a case, use of the national stereotype does not represent an opportunity to enhance the product's stereotype. Again, a strategy which positions the product among competitors' products with favorable stereotypes might possibly be more effective.

While the above implications are not exhaustive, they do illustrate how consumer perceptions of foreign-made products can be used in the development of advertising strategy. Such strategy development, however, must be the result of product specific research and not the result of managerial speculation.

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Figure 1

Sample Rating Scale

Mechanical Toys Made in Germany

1.	*Fragile*	____	____	____	____	____	*Sturdy*
2.	*Inventive*	____	____	____	____	____	*Imitative*
3.	*Inferior*	____	____	____	____	____	*Superior*
4.	*Technically Advanced*	____	____	____	____	____	*Technically Backward*
5.	*High Quality Workmanship*	____	____	____	____	____	*Low Quality Workmanship*
6.	*Traditional Styling*	____	____	____	____	____	*Modern Styling*
7.	*Considering both price and quality, a good value*	____	____	____	____	____	*Considering both price and quality, a poor value*

Table 1

Comparison of Results of Adolescents' Perceptions of All Products from Sample Countries with Individual Product Classes from Those Countries

N=130

Concepts	F	d.f.[a]	Probability	Probability*
All U.S. Products - U.S. Autos	3.214	252	<.003	<.005
All U.S. Products - U.S. Cameras	5.318	252	<.001	<.005
All U.S. Products - U.S. Toys	6.228	252	<.001	<.005
All German Products - German Autos	1.927	252	<.066	<.016
All German Products - German Cameras	3.122	252	<.004	<.01
All German Products - German Toys	5.090	252	<.001	<.01
All Japanese Products - Japanese Autos	2.558	252	<.015	<.01
All Japanese Products - Japanese Cameras	6.616	252	<.001	<.01
All Japanese Products - Japanese Toys	6.219	252	<.001	<.01

[a]Degrees of Freedom = $n_1 + n_2$ - number of variables - 1

*Etzel and Walker Study